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Understanding the “Maluku Wars”: Overview of Sources of Communal Conflict and Prospects for Peace

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Abstract

We still know very little about the experience of violence in the so-called “Maluku Wars” of 1999 to 2002, much less about the individual motivations that led to such sustained and intense violence between neighboring communities of Muslims and Christians. Nevertheless, since the beginnings of the communal violence, observers have speculated on the conditions that might have produced sufficiently intense feelings of insecurity and resentment among residents of Maluku, and the political interests that might have cultivated and directed them towards a religious Other. By way of understanding the genealogy of violence in Maluku, this paper reviews four broad explanations: organized provocation by strategic players at the national level; the increase in sectarian politics during the collapse of the New Order regime and subsequent political reforms; intensification of socio-economic competition between immigrants and indigenous populations following the economic crisis of 1997; and the deepening of religiosity under conditions of uncertainty associated generally with globalization and more specifically with the national political transition and economic crisis in Indonesia, as well as rumor and conspiracy theories that abound during the break down of law and social order. The paper finally provides a description of the process of reconciliation and prospects for future peace.

1 Introduction

In the absence of ethnographic research we do not yet know the particular motivations of individual perpetrators of communal vi-

olence in the so-called “Maluku Wars” that occurred from 1999 to 2002, and no doubt many Moluccans and others will be asking themselves and their neighbors searching questions about their involvement in the conflict for years to come. Nevertheless, there are by now various accounts of the precipitant events, structural interests, and historical processes that produced the conditions for conflict, such that it is possible to identify several broad explanatory “stories”. This paper provides an overview of these sometimes competing, sometimes complementary accounts, and also considers the process of reconciliation and prospects for sustained peace by way of establishing a context for other papers in this special issue of *Cakalele*.

Although there was an apparently related outbreak of street violence in Dobo, on January 15–17, 1999, the precipitant event of the “Maluku Wars” is generally acknowledged in most “stories” to have been a personal altercation between an Ambonese bus driver and a Bugis passenger in Ambon, January 19, 1999, which rapidly escalated to incorporate Christian and Muslim gangs from neighboring communities. After several days of destructive urban riots in the city, sectarian conflict spread rapidly throughout the island of Ambon and Central Maluku, catalyzing further conflicts in Aru, Kei, North Maluku, Tanimbar, Buru and even as far away as Lombok. Although figures are still unreliable, it is estimated that 5,000–9,000 people may have lost their lives in Maluku, from 300,000 to 700,000 were made homeless, and around 29,000 houses and hundreds of mosques and churches were destroyed, in what has been represented as “frenzied slaughter, savage mutilations, forced conversions, and the wanton destruction of property” (Schulze, 2002, p. 57).

The Indonesian government, pre-occupied with an economic crisis and political transition, and fearful of a Muslim backlash, failed to intervene decisively to control the communal violence. Factions of the government may even have helped foster resentments and provoke confrontation. The military and police proved inadequate to the basic task of repressing violence: different ser-

vices and units were accused of bias, and of covertly supporting, or even joining co-religionists in the conflict. Over time, the opposing sides became progressively better-armed and organized in practices of terror, but mediation and segregation of opposing communities were still able to create periods of uneasy peace. This tense situation continued more or less until the arrival in Ambon and North Maluku of Laskar Jihad (“Warriors of the Holy Struggle”) from Java in May 2000. Formed in response to devastating attacks by Christian villages on neighbors in North Maluku, their superior arms and training, and logistical support from the military, escalated the conflict and reversed the relative fortunes of the protagonists, especially in Kao and Kota Ambon where Christian forces had enjoyed some territorial gains.

A state of emergency was declared in both Maluku and North Maluku on June 26, 2000, and elite troops were sent to restore security. Violence had generally declined by early 2001, as these troops partitioned Kota Ambon into Christian and Muslim cantonments, with clearly defined and protected neutral zones of interaction, and successfully battled Laskar Jihad throughout the province. The appointment of new leadership, including Brigadier General I Made Yasa, a Hindu, as commander of the Pattimura forces, and the establishment of clear lines of command, also increased confidence in the neutrality of the security forces. The military’s motivation to secure Maluku also perhaps increased when parliament replaced the moderate reformist president, Abdurrahman Wahid, with nationalist Megawati Sukarnoputri, who enjoyed close ties with senior army officers, and certainly with international pressure following the events of “9/11” in the United States and the Bali bombing of October 2, 2002. Importantly, also, following the Bali bombing, Ja’far Umar Thalib announced the disbanding of Laskar Jihad, although ostensibly for “internal” and “moral” reasons.

The government-brokered Malino II peace accord was signed on February 12, 2002, and the processes of pacification, disarmament, return for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and reconciliation of hostile communities has substantially progressed since

then. The State of Civil Emergency was lifted in North Maluku in May and in Maluku in September, 2003 and the curfew was finally lifted in Ambon in September, 2003. Nevertheless, there have been outbreaks of sporadic violence and communities remain divided: some neighboring villages on Ambon island and in the Lease Islands, for example, continue to attack each other, and Kota Ambon is still a divided city, with a “neutral” zone separating Muslim and Christian sectors.

2 The genealogy of violence

The apparently “run-of-the-mill” argument (Spyer, 2002, p. 24) that sparked the riots in Ambon is, in fact, illustrative of the general genealogy of sectarian violence in Indonesia. First, there is a connection between so-called *preman* (“street thugs”) and disaffected members of the national elite who have a strategic interest in provoking violence. Second, both the gangs and the elites are identified by religious affiliation, consistent with increasing segmentation of civil society and factionalization of national politics. Third, political and economic resources are distributed unequally between the two respective segments, and the balance is changing rapidly due to “affirmative action” in local government policies and the effects of immigration and development. Finally, due to the combined effect of the severe economic crisis that began in 1997, the transition from authoritarian rule that followed from the resignation of Suharto in May 1998, the changing role of religion in Indonesian society, and the generally ongoing processes of modernization and globalization, there was generalized sense of uncertainty, insecurity, mutual suspicion, and sensitivity to rumor. In this situation, religion and nationalism might provide some sense of continuity and stability, but they are also all too easily exploited by ideologues and transformed into a generalized sense of paranoia and hostility towards threatening others.

Each of these causes alone can hardly account for the chaos unleashed in Maluku from 1999 to 2001, but if they are combined

in dynamic ways with stories of individual motivations and personal experiences we might begin to understand how the “Maluku wars” were generated and sustained. This is surely a vital first step towards mitigating or preventing this tragedy from recurring.

3 “Premanism”

Early in the conflict it was already apparently a “near-universal belief” (Human Rights Watch, 1999), that the violence in Ambon was part of a general conspiracy by “mysterious elements” in Jakarta, which are variously identified as: “rogue” military elements loyal to the Suharto family (Jubilee Campaign, 1999, p. 6); “entrenched military and economic interests” intent on destabilizing the Wahid administration (Aditjondro, 2000a); “hardline factions of the political elite” bent on derailing the process of political reform (Hefner, 2001, p. 1); or senior military officers intent on diverting attention from the investigation of human rights violations in East Timor (Tomagola, 2000). Throughout the 1990s, there were incidents of occasional violence between Christian and Muslim youth in Jakarta (Turner, 2003, p. 260), and following Suharto’s resignation in May, 1998, there were several incidents throughout the country betraying telltale signs of organized provocation by *preman* or “street thugs” (Human Rights Watch, 1999). George Aditjondro (2000a) identifies “delinquent Moluccans” in co-religious Jakarta street gangs and their connections among disaffected military officers and members of Suharto’s family or circle of “cronies”. He claims that the gangs are employed as provocateurs by a shadowy “Maluku operation” that includes: “disgruntled generals” resisting reform of TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia or “National Forces of Indonesia”), and particularly the relative loss of power of the army due with the end of *Dwifungsi* (“dual function” i.e. both military and political); powerful businessmen who control plantation and logging interests in the province; Muslim groups opposed to the secularism of the Wahid presidency; and ultimately, Suharto himself.

What might in fact be taken to be the original precipitant of the violence in Maluku—the “Ketapang Incident” in November 1998—was triggered by a fight between a local Muslim youth and a member of the Christian Ambonese “Coker”¹ gang, at an entertainment center within its territory in West Jakarta. When the gang responded by publicly intimidating local residents and businesses, they were engaged in running street battles by rival Muslim gangs, and mobs destroyed Christian businesses and local churches. The Coker gang lost territory and perhaps “hundreds” of its members moved to Ambon, effectively exporting a turf war among rival gangs and their respective “backers” to Maluku, where it was transformed into religious violence (Human Rights Watch, 1999, p. 2). Thus, when Christians gathered to protest the Ketapang Incident in Kupang on November 30, rampaging mobs attacked Muslim immigrants and mosques, and in December there was violence between youth groups in Poso, Central Sulawesi, presaging the serious inter-religious conflict that erupted there in April 2000.² Following related gang violence in Dobo, the atmosphere in Ambon was tense as rival gangs, supported by co-religious youth in the neighborhoods of Christian Mardika and Muslim Batu Merah prepared to defend themselves against imminent attack. Everywhere youth played an important role in the violence, and very often violence took the form of gang warfare, even to the extent that participants were identified by their “colors”: “whites” for Muslims and “reds” for Christians.

There are many reports of military involvement in assaults on both sides, and even if most of this was opportunistic and uncoordinated, as argued below, there is some evidence of that Kopassus (Komando Pasukan Khusus or “Army Special Forces”), using tac-

¹Originally derived from *Cowok-Cowok Keren* (“Handsome/Cool Boys”), or perhaps, according to Aditjondro (Aditjondro, 2001), *Cowok Kerempeng* (“Skinny Boy”), the gang was renamed during the conflict to *Cowok-Cowok Keristen* (“Christian Boys”) (Sholeh, 2003, p. 14, n. 9)

²Violence in Kupang was provoked by speech of retired Christian army officer who is alleged to have played a key role in Ambon.

tics developed in East Timor, was behind Coker attacks on “neutral” targets. These attacks may have been designed to re-kindle community violence, even as peace and reconciliation progressed through 2002 (AFP, 2003, Tapol, 2003). While it is easy to identify beneficiaries of the conflict in Jakarta, it is harder to provide anything but circumstantial evidence of their direct involvement. This is not sufficient to prove the conflict in Maluku a “war by proxy among the Jakarta elite” (Laksamana.net, 2002). If there is widespread suspicion of organized provocation by strategic interests, but as Bartels (2000, pp. 2–3) argues, “it is unlikely that outside agitation alone could have provoked the bellicosity between the two indigenous religious groups ...if there was not already a fertile ground for it to flourish”. What was the nature of this ground so ready for cultivation?

4 Sectarian politics

The New Order was particularly sensitive to the role of religion in national politics and it systematically repressed political identities based on so-called *SARA* issues (*Suku, Agama, Ras dan Antar golongan* or “ethnic, religious, racial or tribal identities”). Religious affiliation was required of all citizens as a means to counter communism, but the political potential of Islam, for example, was carefully contained through promotion of the secular ideology of *Pancasila*, management of political parties, discrediting of Islamic organizations and leaders, and, when necessary, outright repression (Bertrand, 2004, p. 77). In fact, early in the New Order regime, Suharto had strategically isolated Islamists by promoting Christian and *abangan* (nominal and syncretist Muslim Javanese) military officers and technocrats, but when these “nationalists” became critical of his corrupt regime and threatened his power, there was a “flip-flop” in policy (Hefner, 2003, p. 13) which resulted in the “greening” of the military and cabinet through the 1990s, as symbolized by the rise of individuals like General Faisal Tanjung and B.J. Habibie. The influential ICMI (*Ikatan Cendekiawan*

Muslim se-Indonesia or “Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals”) was founded in December 1990 in order to counter economic marginalization of Muslims, while long established organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (“Revival of Scholars of Islam”) and Muhammadiyah enjoyed a new found political influence under the “new thinking” of modern “accommodationist” leaders such as Abdurrahman Wahid and Amien Rais, respectively (Bertrand, 2004, p. 85). Through their influence the social presence and civil role of Islam increased, as witnessed by the wearing of the *jilbab*, greater numbers making the *haji* pilgrimage, an increase in mosque building, and the rise of Sharia banks and insurance companies (Hasan, 2002, p. 162).

When modern moderate Muslim leaders, in their turn, became critical of Suharto and embraced *reformasi* (democratic reform), Suharto turned to conservative religious organizations such as KISDI (*Komite Islam untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam*, or “Islamic Committee for Solidarity with the Islamic World”), whose goals include the propagation of Islam (*da’wa*) through civic action and the institutionalization of Islamic law (*sharia*). The influence of Wahhabism and Salafi society had recently deepened in Indonesian Islam, in part due to education of a new generation of Muslim leaders in Saudi Arabia, and a number of radical groups that had emerged to promote these religious goals were also opposed to secular processes of democratization, the decentralization of authority to the regions, and the accounting of the military for human rights abuses (Hasan, 2002, pp. 149–151). Most significant for the conflict in Maluku is the FKAWJ (*Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah wal wal Jama’ah* or “Communication Forum of the Followers of Sunnah and the Community of the Prophet”) which was founded in February 1998 to promote “Islamic values” and Laskar Jihad, its paramilitary military wing, formed by Ja’far Umar Thalib in Yogyakarta on January 30, 2000, explicitly to defend Muslims in Maluku from religious persecution (Hasan, 2002, Schulze, 2002). Even though then President Abdurrahman Wahid expressly forbade them from traveling to Maluku, up to 3000 trained Laskar

Jihad warriors arrived on state-owned vessels unhindered, and in fact abetted, by security forces.

In hindsight, we can see that the Suharto regime's response to its “legitimation crisis” effectively re-opened some very basic questions on national identity, including the definition of national boundaries, the role of Islam in national politics, the relative importance of regional and central governments, and mode of representation of ethnic groups (Bertrand, 2004, p. 3). The process of reformasi intensified political and socio-economic uncertainty that was exploited by political entrepreneurs in traditional Indonesian fashion: that is, by translating it into neo-*aliran* or sectarian terms (Hefner, 2003, Bertrand, 2004, Brown, 1994), often resulting in ethno-religious conflict. Tadjoeeddin (Tadjoeeddin, 2002), for example, documents a marked increase in the number and intensity of incidents of mass violence throughout the archipelago immediately following resignation of Suharto in May 1998.

The local effect of the political transition was to destabilize established patronage networks and intensify the politicization of ethnic and religious identities (Klinken, 1999, p. 2). In Maluku, access to political resources has been defined by religious affiliation since the colonial era, and indeed old resentments at the preferential treatment of Christians by the Dutch, or the “collaboration” of Muslims with the Japanese, have resurfaced in the context of communal violence. The Christian elite has long dominated provincial politics, and in Ambon a relatively large proportion of the Christian population depends upon employment in the civil service or upon government contracts (Klinken, 2001). Ostensibly as a means to balance political representation, the province's first Muslim governor, Saleh Latuconsina, upon appointment in 1992, began placing Muslims in positions of authority in his administration, and recruited Muslim school teachers. Even if only substantially cosmetic in effect, this led to charges by Christians of “Islamic nepotism.” The sense of political marginalization only increased with the promise of democratic elections of local government and decentralization of government authority International

Crisis Group, 2000, p. 3). Meanwhile, the governor's Christian rival mobilized street gangs to form "a network motivated by material gain but clothed in the language of religion" (Klinken, 1999, p. 3).

In North Maluku, the prospects of decentralization and the creation of a new *kecamatan* (district) in North Halmahera intensified ancient rivalries between the Sultanates of Ternate and Tidore for control of territory and the governorship (Alhadar, 2000, p. 2). The Sultan of Ternate supported his Christian clients in Kao in their struggle against immigrants from Makian, even deploying his personal "yellow" troops in the conflict, while the Sultan of Tidore supported the Regent and the mostly Muslim population of Central Halmahera, backing a "white" militia which was formed in response (Tomagola, 2000, p. 4). North Maluku too, provides evidence that even following the peace agreements, interpersonal political rivalries and neo-patrimonial politics at the village level has frustrated reconciliation (Satriawan, 2003).

At the same time, Muhamad Najib Azca (2003) shows how local security forces, their privileges threatened by reforms, their morale and public image eroded, their operations hindered by poor coordination between services, and their ranks divided by ethnic and religious affiliation and loyalties to different leaders, nevertheless possessed sufficient residual political resources to influence the sectarian competition to their own ends. Whether its "rogue elements" initiated the conflict, the military was ineffective in stopping violence during the first 18 months, and indeed contributed to it: their weapons and tactics under "shoot-to-kill" orders escalated the death toll and the different services and units condoned or actively supported actions of their co-religionists (International Crisis Group, 2002, p. 1). In Ambon, for example, the military was widely perceived to be partisan as relations between the Christian community and *Korem Pattimura* ("district military command") had become increasingly strained through the 1990s for a number of reasons: first, was a longstanding dispute between the command and the GPM (*Gereja Protestan Maluku* or "Protestant Church of

Maluku”) over land at its headquarters which it wanted to use to build a mosque; second, there was resentment at the commander’s overt support of the Muslim candidate for governor; and third, was the legacy of the “Batu Gantung” incident of November 18, 1998, where the commanders responded heavy-handedly to a student demonstration against *Dwifungsi* and the Semanggi shootings in Jakarta, leading to public demands for their resignation by local Christian leaders (Azca, 2003, p. 14).

Although local troops were roughly evenly split between Muslim and Christian, reinforcements sent from Makassar and Kostrad (Army Strategic Command) not surprisingly sided with Muslims in Ambon city, a significant proportion of whom are BBM, a sometimes pejorative term for migrants from South Sulawesi (Bugis, Buton and Makassar). Aditjondro (Aditjondro, 2000a, p. 3) suggests, moreover, that leaders of these forces were close to General Wiranto, and by implication to the conspiratorial “Maluku Operation”, a claim reinforced by the fact that some members of the military deserted their units and are suspected to have joined combatants in advisory and logistical roles. The police were also said to be “contaminated” by religious affiliation: *Polda* (*Polisi Daerah*, or “Police Regional Command”) and the special forces *Brimob* (Brigade Mobil or “Mobile Brigade”) in Ambon, for example, were accused of siding with local Christians, while *Polres* (*Polisi Resort*, or municipal police) was accused of supporting Muslims. It has also been suggested that regardless of religious of unit, service or religious affiliation, individual troops from the various services in Ambon may have tolerated, if not encouraged, continuing violence in order to obtain protection money from their clients (International Crisis Group, 2002, p. 1).

The escalation of violence in Maluku helped strengthen the political position of the military as a whole during a period when the national government was moving towards civilian control and it was used to justify the maintenance of the territorial command structure that ensures a military presence at every administrative level of society, from provincial down to district, sub-district and

village levels, in order to defend the territorial integrity of NKRI (*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia* or the “Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia”). Accused of forming shadow governments, sometimes more powerful than the civilian administration, and of corruption and criminality in order to generate revenue, territorial commands were argued to be redundant once the police were separated from the Indonesian armed forces in April 1999 (Tapol, 2002). In fact, however, in May 1999, the military re-established the previously dismantled an area command, Kodam Pattimura, a prelude to the formation of Kodam Iskandar Muda in Aceh, in February 2002, and the announcement of plans for new kodam in Central and South Kalimantan and West Papua.

The security situation in Maluku dramatically improved with the arrival of “Yongab” (*Battalyon Gabungan* or “Joint Battalion”), consisting of crack riot troops from three military services. Accused of harassment and excessive use of force, Yongab troops nevertheless succeeded in stabilizing the situation by effectively crippling Laskar Jihad in several confrontations in 2001. It is suggested that with Wahid gone, there was increasing willingness of military to end violence, since Megawati Sukarnoputri enjoyed good relations with senior military officers, although, again, “rogue” elements are suspected to be behind the sporadic outbreaks such as the attacks in Soya in April 2002, the bombing of Mardika market in July 2002, and the bombing of Lapangan Merdeka soccer stadium in September 2002 (Sholeh, 2003, p. 11).

5 Immigration and socio-economic competition

If the transition from authoritarian to more democratic rule is often accompanied by nationalist and ethno-religious conflicts, due to the renegotiation of national identity, the breakdown of the capacity of government, and resistance by entrenched power holders (Snyder, 2000, p. 310), so also the general process of globalization produces economic and political insecurities that weaken ties of community and lead to renegotiation of regional and lo-

cal identities (Brown, 2000). Throughout Indonesia during the 1990s, sporadic outbreaks of violence attested to increased tension between social groups, and often the first targets were the socioeconomic activities of minorities in the form kiosks, stalls, stores, and vehicles, as well as government offices. In Maluku the combined effect of political transition, monetary crisis of 1997, legacies of uneven economic development, population migration, modernization, and conflicts over land at the regional and local level, intensified competition over government controlled jobs and resources, and led to the political mobilization of identity based on particularistic notions of rights and entitlements.

In North Maluku, the cumulative resentment of Christian residents in an area south of Kao on Halmahera towards Muslim residents who had been resettled from the island of Makian in the 1970s, exploded into violence with the issue of a central government decree in August 1999 that created the new *kecamatan* (“district”) of Malifut. Although originally conceived as a temporary relocation during a threatened volcanic eruption, the 30,000 Makianese transmigrants have long cultivated land within the ancestral territories of Kao villages, which they now claim as their own without compensation to the mostly Christian Kao people. As well as competing with rural Kao as farmers, Makianese run successful businesses and occupy influential positions in civil service in Ternate. The new district, whose name is a Makianese word, is has a Muslim majority but contains a number of predominantly Christian Kao and Pagu villages. The indigenous population resents the perceived favoritism and government subsidies to the newcomers, particularly given that the new district contains a potentially lucrative gold mine. What seems a clear case of materially based social conflict, however, was transformed into religious violence once displaced Makianese mobilized support for their cause by evoking the specter of “ethnic cleansing” in Kao and called for a “Jihad” against Christians (Alhadar, 2000, International Crisis Group, 2000).

Throughout Maluku, long-term spontaneous migration from

South Sulawesi, and to a lesser extent, sponsored transmigration from Java, has progressively transformed the demographic balance, such that Christians are no longer the majority population: the province had a Christian majority in the early 1970s but is now roughly 54% Muslim. In Central Maluku, Christians Ambonese for example, have been displaced from many sectors of the economy by more competitive immigrants and BBM migrants, in particular, now dominate commercial life of kota Ambon, especially the transportation sector. While Christians retained prominence in civil service and police, recent employment policies of the provincial government favor Muslims, including non-Moluccans. In rural areas, especially on the islands of Seram, Buru and Halmahera, indigenous populations resent the preferential treatment given by the national government to sponsored transmigrants who are overwhelmingly Muslim. In many cases, too, land disputes involving migrants, or longstanding rivalries between neighboring indigenous villages over boundaries and resources have motivated violent conflict, prompting Bartels (Bartels, 2000, p. 13) to claim that “much of the fighting between Moslem and Christian Ambonese may only be fought under the pretext of religious differences but is in actuality a struggle for the increasing scarcer resources of villages—land”.

The shifting ethno-religious balance, as well as the reforms of village administration in 1979, the modernization of protestant Christianity (especially the elimination of ancestor worship), the purification of Islam under the influence of the Muhammadiyah movement, and the general expansion of education opportunities, have also contributed to the progressive undermining of traditional authority structures in Maluku (Dean, 2002, p. 4) (Bartels, 2000, pp. 9–10). Several authors argue that *adat* institutions once ensured peaceful coexistence of Muslim and Christian communities (Turner, 2003, p. 242) (Bartels, 2000), and especially the *pela* relationship of the Ambonese culture area (Ambon, Lease Islands, and West Seram). *Pela* is a ceremonial alliance between villages, which establishes mutual obligations to assist in times of crisis

and in communal projects such as the construction and repair of church and mosque (Bartels, 1977, Cooley, 1967). Although only a minority of such relationships is between villages of different religious adherence, and *pela* only ever describes specific inter-village arrangements, not a generalized kinship between all Ambonese regardless of religion, it has been romanticized in both popular and academic accounts. For example, as recently as 1998, then President Habibie used it as the basis of his claim that Maluku provided the nation with a model of religious tolerance, and Bartels (2000, p. 8) argues that “because of the existence of the *pela* system, any potential antagonism between Ambonese Moslems and Christians was held to a minimum, as opposed to internecine strife so common between the adherents of these religions throughout the world.” While it not clear the degree to which *pela* is the result, rather than cause, of relative religious tolerance in Ambon, it seems likely that the generalized decline of indigenous beliefs and practices under modernization contributed to the loss of power of village leaders who traditionally would be asked to contain and mediate conflict.

On the other hand, some observers can recall occasional altercations and the desecration or destruction of religious buildings in the recent past, that with the benefit of hindsight suggest merely a relative quiescence in the ancient rivalry for political control of territory between religious communities in Maluku (see (Andaya, 1993)), rather than an state of harmony. Umar Tuasikal (Tuasikal, 2000), an Islamic activist from Java, argues that the Maluku conflict is a continuation of Christian crusades and modern imperialism, part of a historical project to convert Muslims and appropriate their resources. Similarly, Brigadier General Rustam Kas-tor (Kastor, 2000, p. 103), retired commander of Unpatti Korem, native Moluccan, an influential Islamic ideologue in the Maluku conflicts, similarly identifies a conspiracy involving the remnants of the RMS (*Republik Maluku Selatan* or “South Maluku Republic”) in the Netherlands, the GPM, and the local chapter of the “Christian-Nationalist” PDI-P, which he claims is part of a global

Jewish-Christian conspiracy against umat Islam. In this view, the Christianization of Maluku is prelude to broader goals of creating a Christian state incorporating the “Golden Triangle” of Maluku, North Sulawesi and Irian Jaya (Fealy, 2001, p. 2) (Bubandt, 2003, p. 17) and ultimately of subjugating the world’s most populous Muslim society (Turner, 2003, p. 262). In such accounts the preferential treatment of Christian Moluccans under Dutch colonialism, and their role as “*Belanda Hitam*” (“black Dutch”) in the KNIL (*Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger* or “Royal Dutch East Indies Army”), are “festering wounds” that remain a primary source of resentment (Schulze, 2002, p. 57). As a result the struggle for independence is represented not only as anti-colonial, but anti-Christian (Kastor, 2000, p. 95), and is used to evoke the racial prejudices of Javanese against “primitive” Melanesians (see (Aditiondro, 2000b, p. 2). Even though Muslims participated in short lived RMS when it was declared in 1950, it is derisively referred to as *Republik Maluku Serani* (“Republic of Christian Maluku”) and associated with the contemporary protestant church. The conflation of separatism and religion enables Laskar Jihad, for example, to identify as an “Islamic nationalist” organization formed to defend both the unity and integrity of the Indonesian state and Islam.

Early in the conflicts, Christians were more likely to identify immigrants and political provocateurs as immediate sources of violence, but when Jakarta failed to intercede—such as when President Wahid stated in 1999 that the Ambonese should solve their own problems (Schulze, 2002, p. 65)—they too identified a larger conspiracy against them. The *Forum Kedaulatan Maluku* (“Maluku Sovereignty Forum”), founded in December 2000 in response to Laskar Jihad, stated in its “Declaration of Independence” (Maluku-FKM, 2000), for example, that “the Human tragedy that occurs in the Moluccan islands in the past two years was the result of a collaboration and conspiracy organized by the Indonesian government by using the Indonesian Army and the Jihad vigilantes as a means to fossilize the Moluccan people.” Yet some Christian spokespersons worked to exorcise the ghost of separatism, evok-

ing indigenous (*Alifuru*) identity as a means of uniting indigenous Moluccans (Turner, 2003, p. 254), whether Christian or Muslim, against outside agitators and combatants, just as North Maluku's Christians appealed to indigenous identity of the “ethnic groups” of Tobelo, Galela, Kao and Sahu (Bubandt, 2003, p. 10). However, when FKM leaders raised the RMS flag on April 25, 2001, the anniversary of its independence proclamation—even if most Christians were opposed to separatism and the FKM was not exclusively Christian—they only fulfilled the fears of many Indonesians, and as much as Laskar Jihad, demonstrated the powerful relationship between the ideals and symbolic systems of nationalism and religion (Peterson and Walhof, 2002, p. 9) (Rapoport, 1992, p. 126).

6 Religiosity

So far in this overview, I have considered some of the conditions for competition and conflict between communities in Indonesia and Maluku, and how these were exploited by strategic economic and political interests. It is harder, however, to understand the feelings of vulnerability and betrayal, and what Patricia Spyer (2002) calls the “climate” of suspicion that provides the immediate motivational basis for violent action. As Timmer (Timmer, 2003, p. 5) puts it: “What remains obscure is what it is that made individuals able [to] kill, to rape, and to put themselves in positions in which they could easily get killed. What kind of intimate personal and crowd feelings and forces operated to ready people to engage in abnormally horrifying acts and put their own lives at stake?” This is a question that many individuals involved in conflict will themselves surely have a hard time answering, but some evidence is available in the form of books, pamphlets, letters, web pages and internet messages. These documents attest to the persistent potency of mythical representations of ancestry and homeland, and the role of paranoid and apocalyptic discourses whose reproduction works to project collective social anxieties onto a common ethno-religious enemy (Turner, 2003, p. 244) (Brown, 2000, p.

25) (Bubandt, 2001). But why is religion such an effective “screen” for this projection and how exactly was religiosity experienced in the “Maluku Wars”?

It has been remarked that observers from secular traditions generally find it difficult to acknowledge the degree to which different logics and moralities affect behavior in religious communities (Selengut, 2003, p. 6), and they consequently underestimate the degree to which religion underwrites violent conflict on its own terms (Appleby, 2000, p. 30). Richard Fox (Fox, 1999, p. 4), observing the media treatment of the violence in Maluku, noticed how early “sensational” reports on co-religionists spontaneously “running amuck”, were replaced by more distanced analyses of structural interests organizing against the order of the nation state, evidence of “an implicit theory of human action according to which people do not really act on the basis of ‘religious’ motivation.” Academic observers, too, tend to downplay the role of religion in the conflict, insisting that what appears to be a religious war is upon closer analysis “really” motivated by socio-economic, political and territorial grievances that are mobilized and manipulated by political interests and agents provocateur (see, for example, (Schulze, 2002, Klinken, 1999, Aditjondro, 2000a, Aditjondro, 2000b, Hefner, 2001)). We do not have to agree entirely with Rustam Kastor (2000), for example, that “this is a religious war,” or Agus Wattimena, leader of Coker, that “this is a real religious war” (quote in International Crisis Group, 2000, p. 15), but neither should we dismiss the “religious” justifications of violence by those involved in the conflict as evidence of “false consciousness”. In short, “violence in God’s name” is not simply a spurious cover for grievance or greed (McTernan, 2004).

Religious feeling plays such an important role in communal conflict because its confessional loyalty translates into clearly defined and durable community and its model of faith counters rational calculation and enlightened self-interest, cultivates a righteous sense of persecution, and provokes a passion against evil that fuels the excesses of group hatred (Appleby, 2000, p. 4) (Gaylin,

2003, p. 228). Although religions are indeed manufactured or invented within particular historical and political contexts (McCutcheon, 1997, Peterson and Walhof, 2002), their creeds are represented as fundamental truths, providing some security in times of uncertainty, and countering the challenges of relativism and secularism of late modernity (Appleby, 2000, pp. 57–61). Moluccan communities have for centuries been defined in terms of religious adherence, and even in urban Ambon, the geographical mixing and social intermixing of populations is limited, so the religious Other is easily discriminated. As we have seen, the historical origins and experiences of the religious communities are distinct, and the current conflict could be presented as continuous with an older competition and conflict, as well as with a modern struggle on a global scale: the so-called “clash of civilizations” (Huntington, 1996). If Maluku had once seemed a model of religious tolerance, the conflict was represented and experienced in terms of Manichean struggle between Muslims and Christians: FKAWJ’s homepage, for example, was entitled “Jihad in Ambon: Victory or Martyrdom”, and even without a declaration of “Holy War,” Christian combatants could aver that “there are only two options—to die or to kill the enemy” (quoted in Schulze, 2002, p. 63).

World religions, and Abrahamic religions in particular, also possess a stock of martial metaphors and military imagery and promise reward for violent sacrifice. The concept of some transcendent authority—the “will of god”—which translates into the absolute authority of church officials, and religious myths of election (the “chosen-ness” of a people) and persecution, provide a powerful alternative to the delusional formation of paranoia which transforms victim-hood into vengeful action (Gaylin, 2003, p. 115) (Smith, 1999). Religion potentially translates secular differences between a particular “us” and “them”, the known and the unfamiliar, onto the cosmic plane and thus into a moral struggle between the amorphous forces of order and chaos, and good and evil, for which the ultimate sacrifice—murder or martyrdom—is possible (Jurgensmeyer, 1992, p. 114). In the case of Maluku, for example, *fatwa*

were issued by clerics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and Christians in Maluku were identified as *kafir harbi* (belligerent infidels), the most dangerous category of non-Muslims who may be killed with religious blessing. If public statements by leaders of the Christian communities were generally more tolerant, the churches widely distributed exaggerated images of their victimization, as evidenced in their sophisticated web presence through sites such as Ambon Berdarah Online, Masariku Network, and Crisis Center of the Diocese of Ambon (see (Lim, 2003, Bruchler, 2003)), while lay leaders pushed increasingly fundamentalist interpretations of the conflict, particularly following the arrival of Laskar Jihad and increase in Christian losses (Sholeh, 2003).

Finally, religion provides the concept of a “sacred territory” and a set of ready material and symbolic targets whose attack provokes intense feelings: hence mosques and churches were desecrated and destroyed, sacred texts and beliefs were ridiculed, prophets were slandered, and other symbols of faith violated. The attacks by Hitu villagers on Christian neighbors early in the conflict in Ambon, for example, were in response to rumors of the violation of the main Al-fatah mosque, while the cause of *Laskar Kristus* (“Christian Warriors”) gained significant momentum after the destruction of the oldest church on the island at Silo in December, 1999. Religious calendars are also evoked: it is no coincidence that January 19, 1999, the date violence began in Ambon was the day of the *Idul Fitri* celebration; and Christians so feared that Muslims in Tobelo and Galala were conspiring to create a “Bloody Christmas” that they preemptively attacked villages and slaughtered hundreds of Muslims sheltering in a mosque in December 1999, an act that directly provoked the formation Laskar Jihad.

This latter example illustrates the power of paranoia in a climate of suspicion, where each side fears that the other is secretly plotting betrayal, and so engages in what Patricia Spyer (2002, pp. 35–36) calls a “hyper-hermeneutics,” or “discourse of hidden depth” such that people desire to make meaning out of mundane things under crisis conditions where they can, in fact, “see” very little at

all. On the other hand, it is perhaps not surprising that following decades of “conspiratorial statecraft” and upon the sudden freedom of political expression, “conspiracy had become a pervasive and legitimate form of political explanation” within in Indonesia politics during the 1990s (Bubandt, 2003, p. 18). In Maluku, as elsewhere in the country, anonymous pamphlets circulated as part of a “paranoid discourse” that, told of a far-fetched conspiracy by an opposing group and/or atrocities committed in its name, and issued a call for retaliatory action (Bubandt, 2003, p. 8). In Maluku, provocative rumors of beheading, disembowelment, immolation, bloody excision of live fetuses, and forced conversions circulated by word-of-mouth, pamphlets and web-sites. In some cases there is evidence of sophisticated intention, such as a pamphlet in Ambon that claimed the governor planned to replace 38 Christian civil servants (Klinken, 2001, p. 18) and the infamous *Sosol Berdarah* (“Bloody Sosol”) “can letter”—named after the Pagu village where violence first began in North Maluku—which told of a spurious plan by the Christian church to “make war and murder in most sadistic ways imaginable” (quoted in (Bubandt, 2003, p. 10) and to eliminate Makianese from Halmahera as a prelude to a takeover of the island (see Alhadar, 2000, p. 1).

These examples return us to consideration of the role of organized provocation in communal violence, the point at which our analysis of the causes of the “Maluku Wars” began. Although there is much that we still do not understand, we can conclude that the communal violence is the product of complex causation involving the experience of socio-economic insecurity and unresolved historical resentments that, combined with opportunistic leadership, resulted in the intensification of nationalism and religiosity, ultimately igniting passions sufficient to sustain bloody sectarian conflict over more than three years.

7 Reconciliation and prospects for peace

It is widely reported that the people of Maluku, having suffered “war weariness” and having been alienated by “extremist” organizations such as Laskar Jihad and FKM, soon became receptive to gestures of reconciliation. There is still some distrust between communities, and only a few of those who incited and perpetrated violent crimes have been brought to justice, but people have mostly resisted the violent provocation by “outsiders” that still occurs periodically and there are signs that everyday life is returning to some measure of normalcy. Many IDPs have returned to their villages, damaged infrastructure is being repaired, erstwhile enemies are interacting in integrated retail and transportation services, and important symbolic gestures of unity have been made.

Arguably, the most important step towards reconciliation was the government sponsored Malino II peace accord reached by representatives of Muslim and Christian organizations in February 2002. Finally taking decisive action, the Coordinating Minister for People’s Welfare convened meetings which established an eleven-point agreement to end conflict, restore the rule of law, protect the unitary state, establish freedom of movement, eliminate armed organizations, return displaced persons to their homes, rebuild infrastructure, maintain neutrality of security forces, and reconstruct an integrated university. There is some question about whether delegates were truly representative of the people of Maluku and whether the commissioners appointed by the government to investigate the conflict will be able to maintain impartiality due to their closeness to government authorities. Polls show a significant minority of the population (20%) were opposed to the agreement (Pinontoan, 2002), as were organizations such as the FKM and Laskar Jihad, *Front Pembela Islam Maluku* (“Maluku Front of Muslim Defenders”), and *Satgas Amar Maruf Nahi Munkar* (“Special Task Force of Amar Maruf Nahi Munkar”) which united in opposition in the *Forum Silaturahmi Umat Islam se-Maluku* (“All-Maluku Islamic Friendship Forum”) (Kompas, 2002, FKAJ, 2002).

Muslim opposition was based in particular upon a demand for formal acknowledgement that Christians were to blame for initiating the violence, while Christian organizations rejected the use of the term “*Laskar Kristen*” as well as the label “separatist”. It is also true that Malino II is typical of what Ichsan Malik calls the government’s “fire engine” approach, in which distant authorities represent themselves as “saviors in local conflicts” and impose top-down, “instant” solutions that frustrate local initiatives (Malik, 2003). Even then, progress on some of the goals has been slow, due to lack of political will and funds, and representatives of the provincial parliament even threatened to sue the National Government for “liable negligence” in its failure to fully implement the agreement. Most importantly, however, Malino II demonstrated clear, if belated, concern of the central government at the ministerial level and established the authority and responsibility of the civil security forces. Following the end of the Civil Emergency, the military presence visibly reduced and weapons amnesty and regular sweeps have led to disarmament of militias, creating an opportunity for representatives of civil society to continue or initiate efforts at reconciliation and reconstruction.

Perhaps most significant in regard to reconciliation has been the sustained efforts of *Baku Bae*³ and related NGOs to broker meetings between opposing sides, beginning with select meetings of provincial leaders in Jakarta in mid-2000, and expanding progressively to include forty civil society leaders in Bali in October, and over one hundred *adat* leaders, youth group representatives, NGO activists, and “war leaders” in Yogyakarta in December, 2000. These meetings on neutral ground outside the province established dialog between opposed factions and led to the establishment of neutral zones within Ambon, including the temporary campus of Unpatti (Universitas Unpatti, or Pattimura University). Unpatti hosted an important meeting in January 2001 of over one hundred *raja*, orga-

³*Baku bae* is slang in Ambon Malay for “*saling (bersikap) baik*”, or “good to one another”.

nized by *Baku Bae* and facilitated by Sultan Hamengku Buwono X from Yogyakarta which resulted in an agreement to better integrate educational opportunities in Maluku, a commitment later incorporated into the Malino II accord. *Baku Bae* also facilitated meetings of Muslim and Christian journalists in Bogor in March 2001, which resulted in a neutral “Media Center”, located in the neutral zone of Mardika in Ambon, and of Maluku lawyers in Jakarta in January 2002. *Baku Bae* lost some of its momentum when the organization split due to a leadership conflict, but it successfully brokered meetings between the military and local communities, resulting in vital improvement in relations and cooperation on security.

Similarly, the Go-East Institute from Jakarta, with the cooperation of the Crisis Centre of the Diocese of Amboina and local government, organized a symposium in Kei in March, 2001 called “National Dialogue on Revitalizing Local Culture for Rehabilitation and Development in the Moluccas towards a New Indonesia.” Attended by almost 1500 regional leaders, this meeting issued a call for traditional leaders or *Bapa Raja* to play an instrumental role and advocated “the use of local traditions as a meeting point for accommodating the interest of the different groups in the province”. Although the meeting had limited impact beyond Southeast Maluku due to the relative weakness of tradition elsewhere, it highlighted the potential contribution of *adat* institutions in conflict avoidance and mediation.

International NGOs, in collaboration with local counterparts, have also played an important role in reconciliation and reconstruction. Mercy Corps, for example, provides not only emergency needs, but works to strengthen inter-community relations through cooperative self-sufficiency projects and capacity building activities (Mercy Corps, 2004). One of its most important contributions was the establishment a mixed Muslim and Christian office in Ambon in May 2001, enabling it to more effectively work across the lines of conflict. It also created an NGO resource center that became a neutral zone for communication between Mus-

lim and Christian NGOs, which now cooperate in projects such as service provision and the recent clean-up campaign in the city. This neutral zone further attracted other local and international NGO offices, and also a spontaneous neutral market that was then developed with subsidy from the municipal government.

The maintenance of genuinely interactive neutral zones as opposed to the “no-man’s land” between communities that is protected by a heavy military and police presence is vital to reconciliation as they allow the peaceful interaction of communities in pursuit of their self-interest and everyday needs. Neutral zones in Ambon, for example include: several integrated produce markets and more recently Ambon Plaza Mall where Christians are now tentatively shopping;⁴ efforts have also been made to recruit students to mixed high schools and vocational schools—the so-called “reconciliation schools”—as well as to the alternate Unpatti campus; a mixed Maluku Media Center was established in September 2001 to bring together journalists from different communities and to mitigate the polarization of the local press; mixed buses have begun to ply roads from Ambon to neutral transfer points such as Nania near Christian Passo on the isthmus between predominantly Christian Leitimor and Muslim Leihitu, while there are plans to integrate ports such as Tulehu which services Central Seram and the Lease Islands; and recreation facilities such as Lapangan Merdeka soccer stadium and even beaches and resorts, as steps have been taken to promote local and even international tourism (Maluku Media Center, 2003).

While we argued above that religion contains violence in the sense that sacred texts and practices promote intolerance and endorse sectarian conflict, religion also potentially contains violence in another sense—in that it issues injunctions to compassion and acknowledges the sanctity of human life (see McTernan, 2004).

⁴Ironically, the economic effects of the conflict have meant that Christians who previously eschewed jobs in the informal retail trade and transportation services, now have both the motivation and opportunity to become traders and *becak* riders for their segregated community.

Moderate religious leaders have drawn upon these resources to facilitate reconciliation between the sectarian communities. For example, the GPP Maluku (*Gerakan Perempuan Peduli* or “Caring Women’s Movement of Maluku”), originally established in August 1999 as a Christian organization, recruited Muslim women leaders, at first secretly, in order to collaborate on information campaigns, trauma counseling, and training workshops for mothers and youth, in the hope of indirectly and directly reaching those who are particularly vulnerable to provocation. Also of symbolic significance is the concurrent reconstruction of neighboring Silo Church and An’Nur Mosque on neutral road outside of Ambon, and other collaborative efforts to repair religious buildings drawing upon the tradition of *pela*. Recent secular examples include the restoration of the famous *sasi lomp*a ceremony on Haruku (Rumaruson, 2004) and the *Pukul Sapu* (“brush whipping”) festival in Mamala, Ambon (*Ambon Ekspres*, Dec. 3, 2003).

Progress has been made on the return of IDPs, but many remain in camps unsure whether their communities are safe. There is a severe housing problem, with as many as 64,000 families still homeless (Nurbaiti, 2003). Most of these are in camps established in Ambon, Ternate and Sulawesi, but squatting is endemic in urban shop houses and government offices. In other cases, people cannot return to their homes, even if their neighbors will accept them, either because they have been destroyed or because they are occupied by others. Sometimes the new occupants are themselves displaced from their villages, and speculative settlers demand “guarding fees” for the right of return. Government built housing has proven inadequate and corruption has plagued assistance programs. *Baku Bae* representatives even express fear that property disputes will “new source of conflict” (in Nurbaiti, 2003).

Finally, while repair of infrastructure and economic development is of prime importance in restoring everyday life in Maluku, activists stress the importance of investigation into the origins of the violence and the role of security forces as a means to restore public confidence in the government (Malik, 2003). Cases are

being established against both Muslim and Christian troops involved in the violence, but they may be scapegoats and it is hard to believe any of senior officers involved in the “Maluku Operation” will be brought to justice. While leaders of the FKM have been successfully prosecuted for inciting followers to hoist separatist flags on the anniversary of the RMS declaration in April 2002, Ja’far Umar Thalib was acquitted by East Jakarta District Court of charges of inciting hatred of government and fomenting religious violence—in fact the judge even commended him for seeking to maintain national integrity (Laksamana.net, 2003). With national elections approaching later this year it is clear that the government still lacks the political will and capacity to confront radical Islam, a step which is surely necessary to restore confidence among the people of Maluku.

Civil society has rapidly consolidated the peace in Maluku over the last two years, and the hope is that lessons have been learned that will ultimately strengthen it. If peace, in the negative sense, that is as “absence of conflict” between communities, was maintained by a coercive, centralized developmentalist state under the “New Order,” peace in the positive sense, that is as “the presence of justice”, will depend upon a strong, or at least secure, decentralized state that promotes civic nationalism. The economic crisis and the uncertainties of succession have undermined citizens’ confidence in Indonesian state and in patrimonial politics. In order to restore that confidence in Maluku, the central government will have to fulfill its promise of regional development and decentralization, and at the same time to accommodate political Islam without its elements of fundamentalism. It may yet also prove necessary for the government in Jakarta to prosecute “rogue” elements among senior army officers and corrupt members of Jakarta’s political elite who were involved in the violence in order for the people of Maluku to become invested in a new model of civic nationalism, and have faith in the capacity and will of the state to maintain security and promote prosperity necessary to sustain positive peace.

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